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Wednesday, 7 March 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana Torrelio
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement (S/2018/128)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/174)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Mansour Alotaibi, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, for his service as President of the Council for the month of February. We were impressed by the great quality of his work. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Alotaibi and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement (S/2018/128)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/174)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/128, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement, and document S/2018/174, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, members and non-members of the Council alike, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to outline the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As members know, this is my first briefing to the Council since I assumed my functions as Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

I should like at the outset to underscore the outstanding progress made in recent weeks in the preparations for the presidential and legislative elections, including the end of the voter registration process across the country, the enactment of the revised electoral law and the adoption of the electoral budget. I note that at this stage, more than 46 million potential voters, 47 per cent of whom are women, have registered, thereby indicating their intention to participate in the elections on 23 December.

Despite the many challenges they face, these millions of Congolese men and women have signified their commitment to ensuring the first peaceful transfer of power in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I wish to pay tribute today to the determination of the Congolese people to participate in the political process and to shape the future of their country, because it is that determination and commitment that will help achieve the goals set by the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement. On the eve of the commemoration of International Women's Day, I wish to pay special tribute to all Congolese women for their courage and determination to bring about peace, stability and the consolidation of the democratic process in their country. They have played a critical role in ensuring a peaceful process, and I am sure that they will continue to do so.

However, despite the progress made in the electoral process, major challenges remain. In this respect, it is important to restore the faith of the signatories of the

New Year Agreement, both in the political process as a whole and in the organization of the elections. As such, the effective implementation of conciliatory measures and the respect of electoral deadlines are essential. Regarding the implementation of the conciliatory measures, although the Government has released numerous political prisoners since the signing of the 31 December Agreement, many others are still being detained. In that regard, more effort must be made to examine the remaining typical cases and those involving other prisoners, and to pursue political openness.

The disproportionate use of force by the security services during the peaceful demonstrations of 31 December and 21 January is another major concern. This disproportionate use resulted in 16 deaths, more than 100 wounded and 100 arrests. During the 25 February protests, at least 2 more people were killed, 47 were tried and 102 arrested by security forces across the country. Ensuring respect for the freedoms and fundamental rights enshrined in the Congolese Constitution is also crucial. I call on the Government to conduct credible investigations into these incidents and to take appropriate sanctions.

With regard to the electoral process, several key issues on the agenda of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) have yet to be resolved. First, the electoral legislation must be finalized, in particular with the adoption by Parliament of the provisions on the distribution of seats. Secondly, the financial resources needed to organize the elections on time must be regularly disbursed and allocated to CENI by the authorities. Moreover, the Democratic Republic of the Congo electoral support project must be adopted. Finally, differences with respect to some of the election modalities, including the possible use of voting machines, should be ironed out.

(*spoke in English*)

While national political attention remains centred on confidence-building measures and progress in the electoral process, the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has continued to deteriorate. That brings increased risk for renewed instability in many parts of the country, and poses a serious threat to the civilian population, particularly in the East. The activities of the Allied Democratic Forces in the Beni area, and of Mayi-Mayi groups in North and South Kivu continue to pose significant threats to the civilian population, and those groups can still carry out attacks against the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO.) In the Kasai region, the security situation remains fragile, with reports of increased destabilizing activities of Kamuina Nsapu and other militia groups.

The rapidly deteriorating situation in Ituri province, centred around events in Djugu territory, is of grave concern. The outbreak of violence starting early this year, which has led to the deaths of more than 60 civilians and the displacement of more than 200,000 people, poses a significant risk of escalation and requires our full attention. The attack on Maze less than a week ago, which left at least 33 people dead, most of them women and children, was a callous act.

I condemn the persistent attacks by the various armed groups and militia across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the recruitment of children, the rape of women and young girls, the burning of houses and schools, and the desecration of places of worship. It is the responsibility of those who direct and those who perpetrate such attacks to ensure that this unacceptable violence comes to an end. And it is our collective responsibility to ensure that those who direct and perpetrate such crimes be held fully responsible for their actions.

In the context of the political tension and the deteriorating security situation, the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face one of the world's most serious humanitarian crises. The number of internally displaced persons in need of humanitarian assistance has reached 4.5 million, the highest number in Africa. Hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. More than 7.7 million people face severe food insecurity throughout the country. More than 2 million children are severely malnourished and require urgent assistance. Relief efforts are hampered by critically low funding. There is no other way of saying it — the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is shocking.

I would encourage the Council in its deliberations on the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate to maintain its focus on how the political and electoral processes can best be supported, in line with the 31 December Agreement, the electoral calendar and the Congolese Constitution; and on how the security situation can be

stabilized and protection for the Congolese civilian population can best be assured.

A failure to generate confidence in the full and faithful implementation of the 31 December Agreement will serve only to heighten political tensions and to fuel the risks of inciting violence for political ends, particularly within a context of renewed and increased armed group activities. It is essential that all stakeholders find ways to ensure that the elections scheduled for the end of this year are peaceful and credible, and thus serve as a factor that contributes to the stability and security of the country and of the region as a whole.

During these times of heightened tensions, MONUSCO remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting the Congolese authorities and protecting the most vulnerable and most affected by acts of violence — Congolese women and men, girls and boys, who hold the aspirations of their country firmly in their grasp.

We must also not forget those who have lost their lives in the name of peace. That includes Congolese from all walks of life, such as the 27 staff members of the Independent National Electoral Commission who lost their lives during the voter registration process — three were beheaded — while working to ensure that elections can take place on time. That also includes those who have come to serve in the name of peace, such as the 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers who recently laid down their lives at the Semuliki bridge, and the Pakistani peacekeeper who fell in South Kivu. Our thoughts are also with our missing Tanzanian peacekeeper, whom we are sparing no effort to find.

If we are to truly honour the memories of all those who have paid the ultimate price for peace, then we must complete the task at hand and ensure that elections that contribute to the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are held, and that the spirit that led to the signing of the 31 December Agreement prevail. That is a task to which MONUSCO remains firmly committed, and I look forward to the continued support of the Council in that regard.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by acknowledging the presence of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu. I thank him for being with us here today. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her very enlightening briefing, which underscores succinctly the critical historical moment at which the Democratic Republic of the Congo finds itself. The electoral cycle, which is beginning, will indeed be crucial for the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as a whole. The challenge is enormous, while the situation is fragile. The serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the recent increase in intercommunal violence and conflict must move the Council to act.

The current instability is largely the result of delays and uncertainties related to the electoral process, which means that the holding of credible and transparent elections on schedule, while at the same time facilitating a peaceful and democratic transition of power, is crucial to the return to stability in the country. That is our shared priority. Accordingly, France stands ready to support the electoral process so that elections can take place in optimal circumstances and in close consultation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's international partners, in particular the African Union and other countries of the region whose role is essential. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has a crucial role to play in that context. I would like to highlight three key factors that will contribute to the smooth holding of elections before returning to MONUSCO's role.

The first key factor concerns the trust of the entire Congolese people in the sound preparation of the technical aspects of the holding of elections and that the electoral timetable will be respected. Many uncertainties remain with regard to the holding of elections, including, for example, finalizing electoral lists after checking for duplications, while adhering to the prescribed deadlines; the registration process and timetable for Congolese citizens living abroad; the potential use of voting machines and ensuring that the process is transparent through appropriate measures; and the circumstances deemed appropriate for distributing electoral literature throughout the country. All those issues must be open to discussion by all stakeholders, including political parties, potential candidates and civil society.

The Independent National Electoral Commission has a crucial role to play in that regard, and we encourage it to work in a spirit acrof transparency and openness so as to build consensus on the technical aspects of the holding of elections. In that regard, we support the effective establishment of a team of international experts to support the electoral process, which the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the European Union, the United Nations and the International Organization of La Francophonie have agreed to dispatch. Trust, based primarily on transparency in the holding of elections, will therefore be the first key factor leading to success.

The second key factor concerns the electoral environment and the return to a spirit of consensus within the framework of the full implementation of the 31 December Political Agreement. If the outcome of the elections is to be accepted by everyone, it is essential that they be held in an open and peaceful environment in which every candidate can announce his or her candidature and campaign freely without fear of reprisal. In that regard, I call once again for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including, above all, the right to demonstrate, as well as the need for the proportional use of force in the context of law enforcement. It is crucial that the violations observed during the most recent demonstrations not be allowed to reoccur and that those responsible for them be brought to justice. I also take this opportunity to recall the need to fully implement the Agreement of 31 December 2016, particularly with regard to measures aimed at defusing the political situation, such as the release of political prisoners and ending the prosecution of members of the opposition so as to allow them to campaign unhindered. Those measures are needed to provide the conditions for the holding of credible and peaceful elections.

In that context — and this is my third and last point — MONUSCO has a key role to play in supporting the electoral process, contributing to the smooth holding of elections in a free, open and peaceful environment, and protecting civilians. Last year, the Council conferred upon MONUSCO an appropriate mandate to pursue those two strategic goals. For its part, the Mission, through its strategic review, has made the necessary adjustments to better respond to current issues, be more flexible and responsive and better protect civilians. This year, we believe that MONUSCO's priorities must be reaffirmed and maintained. Through its good offices and its technical and logistical support, MONUSCO must help ensure that the right conditions be set in motion for the sound holding of elections. By acting with resolve, completing ongoing reforms and adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates all its components, the Mission must be able to protect civilians in the country more effectively.

The Security Council must lend its full support to MONUSCO in realizing those two strategic priorities. The Council must also provide MONUSCO with the means needed to accomplish those tasks, including by maintaining its troop ceiling and supporting it through solid cooperation with the region so as to ensure the full implementation of the 31 December Agreement and enable all Congolese citizens to trust once more in the process.

In our opinion, those are the conditions needed for the success of the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with the established timetable. Council members may rest assured of France's absolute commitment to achieving that goal.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Let me express our appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her maiden briefing on the current situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the activities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We take this opportunity to extend our congratulations to her on her appointment and wish her all the best in the discharge of her heavy responsibilities at this very critical juncture in the political developments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also welcome His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is indeed a matter of serious concern. The continued instability in the country has displaced many and caused a major humanitarian crisis that requires attention. We look forward to the discussion on this particular issue to be held next week. We welcome progress made in preparations for the holding of elections, including the completion of voter registration across 26 provinces, including the troubled Kasai region.

Initiatives such as the release of the former Chief of Staff of the opposition leader Moïse Katumbi and the granting of amnesty to several individuals sentenced for various offenses are steps in the right direction, but more needs to be done in terms of confidence-building measures, which we believe is vital to creating the atmosphere needed for the successful holding of elections this year.

It is absolutely necessary that all Congolese parties exercise maximum restraint, refrain from making inflammatory statements and defuse the political tensions prevailing in the country. They should also fully commit to implementing the 31 December Political Agreement, which remains the only viable framework for resolving the current political impasse in the country. It is also incumbent upon all Congolese parties to provide all necessary support and cooperation for the timely and peaceful conduct of the elections.

The support of the international community will be vital to ensuring the successful holding of the elections. In that regard, enhancing the coordination of the United Nations, the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international partners is necessary to facilitate coherent and effective support for the electoral process, which is critical to the peace and security of not only the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also the wider Great Lakes region. In that regard, we welcome the various discussions held recently by regional leaders with President Kabila. The idea of a possible joint visit by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat that has been mentioned is also very welcome.

The implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains very important. We appreciate the outcome of the meeting held in Addis Ababa last month, which brought together representatives of the signatories and the guarantors to review the status of the implementation. In the light of the regional dynamics and the continuing multifaceted challenges, the need to redouble efforts towards the full implementation of the framework agreement cannot be overemphasized.

The role of MONUSCO continues to be very important in supporting the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement and the electoral process and in protecting civilians, in line with its mandate as set out in resolution 2348 (2017). We therefore support the extension of the mandate of MONUSCO for another year based on the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

We appreciate the protection through projection concept that MONUSCO is implementing by introducing the review of the locations of the operational bases and rapidly deployable battalions to ensure better protection of the civilian population. The engagement of MONUSCO and the strengthening of local community protection mechanisms in areas affected by the closure of forward bases are also a creative initiative to better mitigate conflicts and violence. We also take note of the measures undertaken by the Mission to enhance the security of its bases and peacekeepers following the tragic Semuliki incident, as well as to review its footprint, in order to adopt a more agile and robust posture in its operations on remote and difficult terrain.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the Mission needs to be sufficiently resourced and equipped. That is also reinforced by the findings of the special investigation into the Semuliki incident. Finally, we are ready to discuss those and other issues in the upcoming negotiation on the draft resolution.

Mr. Zambrana Torrelio (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we welcome the presence of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu. We also appreciate the briefing by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We wish her success in her post.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/174) notes that the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains tense, particularly with regard to the elections and confidence-building measures. In that regard, Bolivia reiterates that, in order to ease such tensions, the parties must implement the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement for the effective holding of peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections that lead to a peaceful transfer of power and ease political tensions.

We urge the signatories to the Agreement to implement it, including the confidence-building measures contained therein. That is why we support the initiatives and the good offices of the Special

Representative in that regard. However, we reiterate and call on the parties not to overlook the principles of preventive diplomacy and good offices aimed at a negotiated political solution. In that connection, we welcome the progress made towards the implementation of the electoral calendar made by the Independent National Electoral Commission and the conclusion by that body of the registration of 46 million potential voters, of whom 47 per cent are women.

We commend the work of the regional organizations, such as the Southern African Development Community and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, for their support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the holding of presidential and legislative elections on 23 December. In that context, we welcome the meeting held on 14 February, which was attended by the Presidents of the Republic of the Congo, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and at which a communiqué was issued calling for the implementation of the Nairobi declarations of 12 December 2013 and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

We would like to emphasize the joint work of the Head of MONUSCO and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region on the preparation of the elections. We highlight their work on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as the repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of the members of the various insurgent groups, both Congolese and foreign, operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We encourage the Mission to continue to expand the community violence reduction programme and to promote peaceful coexistence among communities, in coordination with the Government and armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with its mandate.

We believe that the implementation of such measures would be better complemented by the deployment of the Intervention Brigade, which is essential both to supporting the electoral process and to protecting civilians, so that, in coordination with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the political and security challenges facing the country can be overcome. The most recent report paints a sombre picture of the security situation and gives a comprehensive account of the continuing violence, which includes disputes over natural resources, conflicts between armed groups and intercommunal and ethnic violence. That is why it is estimated that this year, more than 13 million people will need protection and humanitarian assistance. That is an increase of 50 per cent as compared to 2017.

MONUSCO has been present in the country for 20 years. In the light of the renewal of its mandate, we believe that it is imperative to re-evaluate its priorities. We believe that it is important to reflect on the current needs of the Congolese, whether there is a joint strategy with the Government or if the root causes of the conflict, such as the illegal exploitation of natural resources, have really been addressed. It is important to support the decisions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the context of respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity in order to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by welcoming the presence today of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Okitundu. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for updating the Security Council on the intensifying instability and dire humanitarian consequences in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the proliferation of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, Ituri and Kasai, and the significant increase in human rights abuses, with 744 violations in January, 60 per cent of which were perpetrated by State agents. As is too often the case, and as the civilian population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo knows all too well, the result of that instability has been devastating. Some 4.5 million Congolese have now fled their homes and communities. There are more internally displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than anywhere else in Africa. This year alone, 40,000 people have fled from Ituri to Uganda, bringing the refugee population to 670,000 people. That has caused a devastating humanitarian crisis. More than 13.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. That number has doubled since 2017.

There is clearly a link between the ongoing political uncertainty and the increasing insecurity. The Congolese people cannot express their legitimate concerns with the political situation without risking their lives. On 21 January and 25 February, security

forces once again violently repressed demonstrations, leaving at least nine people dead, dozens wounded and hundreds arrested. This must stop.

The holding of credible and constitutional elections by 23 December this year leading to a democratic and peaceful transition of power is essential to ending the political crisis. Without this, there is a significant risk of further violence destabilizing not just the Democratic Republic of the Congo but the wider region also. We welcome the progress made towards elections so far, including the completion of voter registration, the passing of election laws and the announcement of an electoral budget. However, this is no time for complacency. There is much more to do. It is essential that the election calendar be honoured and that key dates set out in the electoral timetable are met, including the completion of the voter register list by 5 April, the audit of the electoral list by 25 May, convocation of the electoral process in June and the registration of presidential candidates in July.

But holding credible elections is about more than complying with timelines. It is also about creating the conditions that enable free and fair elections to take place. In order to do this, we call on the Government to implement the 31 December agreement in full, including the full implementation of the confidence-building measures set out in the agreement. The Government must also respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, opening political space and allowing peaceful demonstrations and freedom of expression.

The United Kingdom is extremely concerned at the high number of violations of political rights and fundamental freedoms in January, and we were appalled by the disproportionate use of force against churchgoers and peaceful protesters on 31 December 2017 and 21 January and 25 February 2018, and the subsequent loss of life.

We recognize that the onus is not only on the Government to deliver credible elections, and in this context we call on the opposition to engage constructively in the process on the basis of the 31 December agreement, which will demonstrate their credibility and potential to govern.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has a crucial role to play in this crucial year in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement. We welcome the efforts to improve MONUSCO's ability to carry out these tasks more efficiently and more effectively. In particular, we welcome efforts to enhance the flexibility and mobility of MONUSCO's forces and to improve their performance. It is important that these reforms be implemented swiftly.

In conclusion, let me be clear. The violence and resulting dire humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the result of the continual disappointment of the people in the political process and the political leaders responsible for this process. The only way to avert further violence is for free and fair elections to take place in December and for the 31 December agreement to be fully implemented. Further excuses and delays will only lead to more violence and despair. The Security Council cannot allow this to happen. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot afford to wait any longer.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by also welcoming Leila Zerrougui to our meeting in her new role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We look forward to working with her, and she can count on our strong support. Let me also express my appreciation for the presence of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Okitundu and thank him very much for being with us today.

Since we last met in this Chamber to discuss MONUSCO and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, yet another peacekeeper has died in that country. I would like to express my condolences to his family and to his country, Pakistan. Deliberate attacks on those working for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere are completely unacceptable. The worsening security situation is also taking a tragic toll on the Congolese population. It includes new ethnic and intra-communal conflicts, continued attacks against civilians and renewed sexual violence and brings with it an acute humanitarian crisis. Human rights abuses and violations are also increasing, especially in the context of the electoral process. In this regard, violence by State security forces against peaceful protesters is of particular concern.

An important step on the path to lasting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would clearly be the holding of credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections on 23 December, with the ensuing democratic transfer of power as per the Constitution and the 31 December agreement. This is something that requires the support of all, including regional actors, with which coordination continues to be essential. We welcome the progress made on technical electoral preparations, including, as noted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the voter rolls, the budget and the electoral laws, but credible elections also depend on the overall electoral environment. For the elections to be credible, it is vital that human rights be respected, promoted and protected. Confidence-building measures, as per the 31 December agreement, including to ensure women's full and effective participation, are also essential. We encourage steps to increase the number of women candidates, in accordance with the Constitution as well as the electoral law.

The year 2018 is indeed crucial for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and MONUSCO has a crucial role to play. The focus of the Mission must continue to be on protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement, including the elections. In so doing, it needs to be effective. To protect civilians, the further strengthening of early-warning mechanisms and, most importantly, early proactive action is needed, including through conflict resolution and good offices. This is in addition to improvements in its military response, which should include enhanced so-called enablers and allow for the Force Intervention Brigade to regain its capability. The Mission's support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to conduct a credible electoral process and enable the holding of free and fair elections is also critical. In supporting this, we would encourage renewed efforts on the part of the Mission in its technical assistance and its good offices. Support for an opening of the political space, confidence-building measures as per the New Year's agreement, women's political participation and efforts to build trust among the stakeholders will be an important form of support by the Mission for the holding of free and fair elections. In all of this, the Mission, of course, needs to be adequately resourced.

Soon a year will have passed since our — the Council's — experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp were brutally killed while investigating violations of Security Council sanctions in the Kasai region. Sweden appreciates the Secretary-General's commitment to establishing the truth. The perpetrators must be brought to justice. Meanwhile, the ability of the Group of Experts to safely carry out the mandate that has been given to it by the Council must be supported by MONUSCO.

In the long run, the recurrent violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be resolved only by addressing its root causes, including not only further democratization, human rights, good governance and the rule of law, but also economic development and poverty alleviation. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region outlines measures in this regard and must be implemented. There must also be an integrated plan for an overall whole-of-United Nations approach in support of sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is the responsibility of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — but with the assistance of the whole of the United Nations, the region and other parts of the international community, including financial institutions — to enhance efforts towards sustainable and lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to welcome the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, and to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Peru is especially concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the eastern part of the country, and the presence of armed groups in the Kasai region. We are concerned about the vulnerability of civilians and the increase in displaced persons and refugees. We are compelled to condemn the ongoing human rights violations, including numerous cases of sexual violence. We are also compelled to condemn the attacks suffered by peacekeepers, and offer our condolences and solidarity over the deaths of Tanzanian and Pakistani peacekeepers.

We are concerned about the Mission's security failures and vulnerabilities, which have been revealed

by the special investigation team led by Mr. Dimitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for the Rule of Law and Security Institutions. We believe it important to follow his recommendations to strengthen staff security.

We reject acts of intimidation against MONUSCO personnel attributed to the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The latter must cooperate with the Mission in its functions of monitoring and protecting civilians, mandated by the Council. That includes civilian access to detention centres, hospitals and other public spaces.

We stress the importance of successfully holding the postponed presidential, legislative and provincial elections. We believe that MONUSCO should continue to provide the logistical support required to that end. However, the Government has the responsibility to lead the process and guarantee free and fair elections. In that regard, we welcome the Government's announcement that President is not eligible for re-election under the country's Constitution. That should promote a better climate for the due development of the electoral process, which should inspire confidence and mass participation of citizens and political groups in the country.

To that end, we must protect and promote human rights, including the rights of expression and association. We consider it important to promote in particular the participation of women and young people in the process. It is also necessary to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the numerous and systematic violations that have been recorded.

We must also address the alarming humanitarian situation of thousands of citizens. Particularly worrisome is the ongoing flow of refugees to neighbouring countries that we have seen since the beginning of the year, and the new outbreak of cholera caused by limited access to potable water, which requires an urgent response from the international community.

Given the situation and the problems observed, we conclude by expressing our support for MONUSCO, which we believe remains crucial for the protection of civilians, the defence of human rights, stability, the fight against impunity and the building of sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ms. French (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Zerrougui. We are very pleased to welcome her to the Council and to have her head the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We also welcome the participation of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. She Okitundu, in today's meeting.

Before I start, I want to take a moment to remember Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán who were kidnapped on 12 March 2017, nearly one year ago. We remember Michael and Zaida and their dedication to improving the lives of the Congolese. We continue to work to ensure those responsible for their murders will be brought to justice.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country at a critical juncture today. For the first time in history, the people of Democratic Republic of the Congo are on the verge of a peaceful democratic transition of power. They have waited too long for this moment, but their enthusiasm is clear. Despite violence, threats and broken promises, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have eagerly lined up to register to vote. They not only have a great desire to determine their future, but they also have an undeniable right to do so.

For nearly 20 years, the international community has invested in MONUSCO to protect the Congolese people from violence and to bring them closer to an enduring, inclusive peace. That Mission is the most expensive in United Nations and history and the most complex. It is fair to ask ourselves what we have gotten in return for this investment. Although the progress has been uneven, the greatest achievement of MONUSCO's precursor mission is clear. The July 2006 voting that resulted in Joseph Kabila's election as President marked the first free elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in over 40 years. It is one of the most complex elections the United Nations has ever helped organize — a true achievement.

Today, the challenge is related, but different. The need to protect the security and rights of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, however, is the same. Free, fair, inclusive and credible elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power are the next indispensable step in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's development. Like elections elsewhere, the promised elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will represent much more than the fulfilment of the minimum right of participation in a democracy. They will be sign of progress across the board for the

Congolese people. They will be a critical concession on the part of the Government that it does not exist to extract wealth and power for an unaccountable elite.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like all Governments, exists to respond to the needs of its citizens, but before that can happen there is much more progress to make. President Kabila has already stayed in office long past his constitutional term limit. His commitment to elections in December that results in his transfer power to a successor remains unacceptably vague. In addition, political prisoners who were guaranteed release under the December 2016 Political Agreement remain unjust unjustly detained. The Government continues to pursue questionable charges against political opponents, and peaceful protesters have been met with violence as the Government cuts off communication and denies their right of peaceful assembly.

However, they are also signs of hope amid the violence and uncertainty. So far, the Government is satisfying the technical requirements for holding elections in December and, most importantly, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are energized and ready to vote. Building on this energy and delivering on the promise of democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now the central task of the Security Council. As we consider the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, we must ensure that it is doing all it can to ensure that elections are held on 23 December, as the Government has promised.

Our highest priority for the Mission will always be to protect Congolese civilians from violence. Troop and staff performance is bedrock. Accountability is essential. Sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. However, our focus on the performance of MONUSCO cannot be allowed to crowd out our focus on its purpose. We are not the devoting this much time and resources to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to reinforce a stagnant status quo. Our objective must always be to move forward to help the people achieve the future they deserve.

We call on the Council to rise to that challenge as we renew MONUSCO's mandate. The Mission must step up to the task of ensuring that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is ready for elections. We must hold the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo accountable for adhering to clearly defined benchmarks as we progress towards elections. We must ensure that Congolese in all areas of the country are able to vote. We must ensure that the ability of citizens and candidates to participate safely and securely in the electoral process is respected. We must ensure the integrity of their vote by using proven and appropriate voting mechanisms.

Finally, and perhaps most important, we must know when those things are not being done. MONUSCO must report to the Council in a timely and transparent manner when progress towards elections is not being made and when peacekeepers fail to do their jobs. It is for that reason that we support a trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure continued Security Council focus on elections.

When Ambassador Haley met with President Kabila last year, they talked about the historic opportunity he has to be the first leader of his country to voluntarily yield power to a democratically elected successor. That would be a remarkable and enduring legacy, and there is no more important work the Council can do but to share in that legacy. We invested a great deal in the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Now is the time to ensure that the investment pays off, not just for the Council but for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time you are presiding over a meeting in the Chamber, Mr. President, allow me to sincerely congratulate you. Equatorial Guinea remains firmly committed to cooperating with you as you conduct your challenging work.

I welcome Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu. His continued attendance at Security Council briefings concerning his country demonstrates his Government's commitment to taking part in the Council's debates on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Equatorial Guinea also thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui for her efforts at the helm of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We congratulate and thank her for briefing to the Council on the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/174) so soon after her appointment. It has helped to us to better understand the current situation in the country.

Equatorial Guinea continues to closely follow, as it must, the developments in the sisterly country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I reiterate my country's commitment to peace there. Stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is essential to the political process. Equatorial Guinea welcomes the initiatives adopted to improve the political environment and approve the electoral calendar on 5 November 2017 and other measures to ensure the successful holding of elections on 23 December. We urge the Congolese Government, the Independent National Electoral Commission, national and international partners and all political actors to take all the measures necessary to guarantee a clean, fair and transparent process that respects the current Constitution and the comprehensive and inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016. Equatorial Guinea believes that the international community and all main actors involved in the conflict should provide all of the required logistical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure that elections are held as scheduled, with every possible guarantee.

It is essential to highlight the fact that, in order to resolve the problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the international community must fully respect the Government's leadership and authority. The solutions developed by the international community will be more effective if they are complemented by Government action. In that regard, as Ms. Zerrougui just highlighted in her briefing, the commitment of the Government to take measures to ensure the holding elections in December must be acknowledged.

The security and humanitarian situation continues to be of concern. Clashes persist in the east of the country, thereby preventing the normalization of the situation and, by extension, causing a humanitarian crisis that, according to United Nations reports, has reached alarming levels. The illegal exploitation of natural resources on the part of militias and other armed groups still active in the area must end immediately. We reiterate our call upon all parties to refrain from perpetrating acts that could worsen the already dire situation. The international community must redouble its efforts to provide an urgent response to the humanitarian needs of the country.

Equatorial Guinea believes that a political solution achieved through frank, direct and inclusive dialogue among Congolese is the only way to achieve peace in the largest country in Central and Southern Africa. All groups active in the country must participate in the political dialogue with a positive attitude.

Finally, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea reiterates its full support for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for its tremendous humanitarian efforts and willingness to promote peace, security and stability in that country. Similarly, Equatorial Guinea congratulates and thanks regional organizations, such as the African Union, the European Union, the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, for their efforts to bring about peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire would like to congratulate your country, Mr. President, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to assure you of its full support throughout your term of office.

Côte d'Ivoire emphatically condemns the terrorist attacks on the headquarters Burkina Faso's armed forces and on the Embassy of France in Ouagadougou. We express our solidarity with France and Burkina Faso at this difficult time.

I welcome today's presence in the Chamber of Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Côte d'Ivoire also congratulates Ms. Zerrougui, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and thanks her for her briefing on the situation in the country.

On the situation in that brotherly country, I would like to make two main points, namely, with regard to the adoption of the Political Agreement on 31 December 2016 and the security and humanitarian situation.

With regard to the adoption of the Political Agreement, the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the progress made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), in particular on the publication of the electoral calendar and the finalization of electoral lists ahead of democratic, credible and inclusive elections. We urge the Congolese political

class to continue their efforts to create an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful elections.

Côte d'Ivoire acknowledges and welcomes the commitment of the Congolese Government to organizing elections within the time frame set. We call on the opposition to commit resolutely to the political and electoral process under way and to play a constructive role in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement.

Despite the progress made in the implementation of the electoral calendar, my delegation remains concerned about the delay in the effective implementation of the Political Agreement. We call on the Government to create the necessary political and social conditions for the enjoyment of individual and collective fundamental freedoms. Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the technical and logistical support of the United Nations for the electoral process under way and encourages greater synergy among the efforts by CENI, MONUSCO and the Congolese Government with a view to ensuring the effective holding of the elections on 23 December.

With regard to the security situation, Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about the ongoing activities of armed groups in several provinces of the country, particularly in North and South Kivu. Despite the efforts of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, those armed groups remain active in the provinces of Tanganyika, Haut-Katanga and North and South Kivu. My delegation is also deeply concerned about the persistence of activities that have led to a mass exodus of people, such as serious human rights violations and deadly attacks against the United Nations forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes MONUSCO's commitment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a particularly difficult sociopolitical and security environment. In order for MONUSCO to carry out its mandate — the renewal of which we support — we encourage it to continue its collaboration with the Congolese authorities. We hope that an adjustment of its current configuration, as part of its new protection-through-projection strategy, will allow for a better assessment of its strategic priorities in the areas of protecting civilians and supporting the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The humanitarian situation also remains a matter of great concern, with nearly 13.1 million people in need of protection and humanitarian assistance across the country, including 4.5 million internally displaced persons, and 670,000 refugees in neighbouring countries.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire would like to call on regional organizations and the international community — namely, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Economic Community of Central African States, the African Union, the United Nations and the Security Council — to provide all the necessary assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a view to the holding of elections on 23 December.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, allow me to welcome the presence among us of His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am also very pleased to welcome Ms. Leila Zerrougui and to congratulate her for her appointmenet. She has our full support. I am sure that her mission will be very successful. Allow me to share our thoughts about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are worried about the divisions among political and civil society actors in the country. The lack of commitment and goodwill on the part of all the political actors might undermine the holding of free, fair and credible elections. We call upon all the political actors to engage in the ongoing political process.

We note that President Kabila committed in January to ensuring that elections would be held as planned and that the Constitution would be respected. However, it is critical that the Government take concrete steps to speed up the implementation of confidence-building measures, to release political prisoners, to allow the return of political exiles to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to lift the ban on public demonstrations and to bring to justice alleged perpetrators of human rights violations. Only by doing so will the Congolese Government show genuine will to normalize the situation in the country. We are concerned about the restrictions on the political space. The Congolese authorities should protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution and stop the harassment of political and civil society actors. We also expect that the security forces will bear accountability for abuses and the use of excessive force against peaceful demonstrations.

The full implementation of the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement remains the only way out of the current political situation. All political actors must realize that there is no alternative to the election. A lack of commitment to the process by the opposition would be a great loss for Congolese society during the transition period. Close cooperation with civil society, particularly with women representatives, including their involvement in the electoral process, is also crucial, as it constitutes a foundation for widely accepted elections.

We welcome the announcement of the Independent National Electoral Commission on the conclusion of the voter registration process. It is now necessary to ensure the further timely implementation of the electoral calendar, the establishment of the legal framework and the provision of required funding. Those actions could help reassure foreign donors of the credibility of the process and encourage them in providing financial, logistical and technical support for the election.

We are concerned about the dramatic deterioration in the humanitarian and security situation and the significant increase in violence, especially in the Tanganyika and Ituri provinces, which has generated significant population displacements. The political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has strategic importance for the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. A peaceful and growing Democratic Republic of the Congo could give a huge boost to the whole continent. We also think that a Security Council visit to the region could bring about positive results. The coming months will be critical in preserving all of the efforts made by international, regional and national actors in order to stabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In conclusion, Poland commends the hard work, courage and sacrifice of the members of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We once again offer it our full support.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words about Kuwait. Given your professionalism and that of your staff, we are certain that the Kingdom of the Netherlands will preside over the Security Council in an outstanding manner during the month of March.

I would like to begin by thanking Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her informative first briefing since assuming the helm of MONUSCO. We wish her every success in her duties, which she will undoubtedly carry out very ably. We also welcome Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Where the political process is concerned, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is undergoing a critical period with regard to the issues of adhering to its electoral calendar and holding presidential elections by the end of the year. We welcome the Government's efforts in that area and stress the importance of ensuring that the presidential elections are held according to the established timetable and without delay. They should be free, fair and democratic and should include all political parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The presence of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration here today indicates how important the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo considers the political process, which it should continue to focus on until political and security stability is achieved and the elections are held on schedule. That is the best way to ensure that the Congolese people can enjoy the decent life that they have waited for so long and that they deserve.

We support the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for another year, as it is providing the Government with important and vital support in preparing for the next political stage. It is the largest Mission of its kind within the United Nations and is operating under many major challenges. We firmly condemn the attacks on it by armed groups and stress that those responsible should be held accountable and brought to justice.

We deplore the dreadful humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The 13 million people currently in urgent need of humanitarian aid are double last year's numbers, as the Secretary-General says in his report (S/2018/174). The economic situation is also seriously worrying, and the blatant incidents of human rights violations are undoubtedly linked to the deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country. However, we are confident that the implementation of the comprehensive Political

Agreement, the confidence-building measures and the holding of presidential elections as scheduled will help to improve the economic, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also underscore the importance of regional and international organizations — particularly the European Union, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the International Organization of la Francophonie — in support of political stability in the country, which is crucial to making progress in the political process. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework agreement embodies the hopes of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as it helps to achieve stability, address the root causes of the conflict and promote confidence among neighbouring countries.

Lastly, we look forward to seeing the results of the investigation into the killing of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán. A year after their deaths, we still do not know who was responsible. We hope that the investigation will be completed and the perpetrators held accountable as soon as possible. We also call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to pursue those responsible for the incident in December 2017 that resulted in the deaths of one Pakistani and 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers and the disappearance of another Tanzanian peacekeeper, as well as the incident that resulted in the deaths of 27 Congolese. We continue to be particularly concerned about the loss of life in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in her new role, and are grateful for her comprehensive briefing. We hope that as the new Head of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) she will be able to establish a constructive dialogue with the country's authorities and enable the Mission to function more effectively. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the Council.

We hope that ensuring that the presidential elections scheduled for 23 December are held on time will help to reduce the tensions in society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We believe that for their part, the opposition forces should cooperate more actively with the Independent National Election Commission, recognize the proposed election dates and refrain from any violence. However, MONUSCO's role in organizing and conducting the elections should not go beyond providing the national authorities with technical and logistical assistance. In our view, the Mission's main job is to improve the security situation. In that connection, we would like to draw attention to the recent increase in the activity of illegal armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have been conducting systematic attacks on civilians, Government security forces and peacekeepers. Changes in that negative trend should be used as a chief indicator of the country's stability.

We were alarmed to learn that after years of calm, clashes between the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups in Ituri province in the country's north-east have broken out again. We have taken note of MONUSCO's decision to establish temporary bases in the area, strengthen patrols and continue consultations with the parties. The series of rebel attacks on peacekeepers at the end of last year and the overall security situation the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has led us to question the conclusions and proposals in the report on the Mission's strategic review. Before extending the Mission's mandate, we would like to see more attention paid to the following points.

The situation with the illegal armed groups operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is difficult and they are a very long way from being fully neutralized. The Mission's mandated task of protecting civilians from the armed groups running rampant in the east continues to be strategically important, and we think it would be ill-advised to divert its attention from dealing with that to other issues. We are puzzled by the Secretariat's rationale for its proposal to end the Mission's stabilization efforts and reduce its cooperation with Kinshasa in supporting camps for former combatants. It will be impossible to find a long-term solution to the problem of armed groups without restoring the Government entities in the east and settling the repatriation issue for former combatants. Besides that, the proposal for redeploying units of the Force Intervention Brigade is also unclear. According to the Secretariat, they should be evenly distributed among the four sectors of responsibility throughout the country. The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2018/174) mentions the Brigade only once. And

yet in yesterday's meeting with troop-contributing countries (see S/PV.8196), we were surprised to learn of the lack of joint operations with Kinshasa against the illegal armed groups.

It is regrettable that some of the proposals of the strategic review are already being implemented without the authorization of the Security Council. In that regard, we would like to mention the concept of protecting civilians through the projection of force. We do not rule out the fact that its implementation could lead to complications in communication within the Mission and therefore, unfortunately, to a recurrence of the December incident in Semuliki. Achieving tangible results from new concepts takes time, as was the case with the so-called rapid deployment battalions. We recall that they became operational only three years after that concept was approved.

Finally, we draw attention to the need to adopt additional measures to ensure the security of peacekeepers. Like many of our colleagues, we are not satisfied with the information provided in the report of the Secretary-General regarding the pace of the investigations into the Semuliki incident.

With regard to the mandate, it is necessary to discuss an entire range of difficult issues. For us, it is already clear that last year's reconfiguration of the Mission's strategic tasks neither improved its effectiveness nor helped the situation in the country.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We congratulate Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui on her assumption of her post and we thank her for her substantive briefing. We welcome the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, to the Chamber.

We are deeply concerned about the increasing tensions and the rift between the ruling majority and the opposition forces with regard to implementing the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement. Confidence-building measures will therefore be essential throughout the electoral process to ensure free and credible elections. We also note the considerable divergence within the opposition, which impedes the political negotiations. The closing of the political space for opponents and other stakeholders is causing greater unrest.

In the light of the current situation, the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is critical to creating an environment conducive to fair elections. The international team of electoral experts, working together with the dedicated senior United Nations adviser, should quickly be operationalized. It is therefore necessary to support MONUSCO in providing technical and logistical assistance for the electoral process. Parliament should also promptly adopt the electoral law and the legislation on the distribution of seats.

We remain concerned about the deteriorating security situation across the country. Despite the efforts of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) to combat foreign and Congolese armed groups, the latter continue with their attacks and to destabilize the situation, which is further aggravated by intercommunity violence. At the same time, FARDC military operations against the armed groups are displacing hundreds of thousands of the local population. It is also clear that the unstable situation in the neighbouring countries of the Central African Republic and South Sudan has had a negative impact on the northern territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That has resulted in large refugee flows, further escalating the humanitarian crisis, which must be addressed with greater funding and support by the international community. The Government must also facilitate unhindered humanitarian access and protect the human rights of the vulnerable populations, in particular women and children.

Perhaps most alarming are the attacks on peacekeepers, which have taken a tragic toll in human lives. MONUSCO, together with troop-contributing countries, should be assisted in enhancing its position and in training its personnel for more offensive strategies and responses appropriate to asymmetric conflicts. That must be accompanied by a greater engagement with regional political leaders and stakeholders to tackle the threat posed by armed groups. We further encourage the measures taken by the Mission to adapt to the current security situation in the country by implementing the protection-by-projection strategy, reorganizing its military component, streamlining civilian tasks and setting up early warning and response mechanisms.

We would also like to express our deep concern about the lack progress in the investigation of the murder of two members of the Group of Experts, Zaida

Catalán and Michael Sharp. We need to further support and encourage senior officials and technical experts to pursue the exhaustive investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing and welcome the presence Mr. Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains difficult. In particular, the security situation in the central and eastern parts is still serious. That is mainly owing to the foreign armed groups. China would like to highlight the following points.

First, advancing the political process is an important path towards resolving the tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The international community should respect the leading role and ownership of the Congolese Government and people in the political process and provide the necessary funding and resources to advance the political process. The international community should continue to support African regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as the main channels for good offices. They should also strengthen coordination, form partnerships and foster cooperation.

Secondly, security and stability represent an importance basis for advancing the political process and national reconstruction. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has the primary responsibility for protecting the civilians. It is important to assist the Democratic Republic of the Congo in enhancing its capacity to guarantee its own security and achieve peace and stability through a process led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has played an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China supports the recommendations of the Secretary-General to continue to extend the MONUSCO mandate. We hope that the Secretariat and MONUSCO will continue to strengthen communication and coordination with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, listen carefully to its views and improve the rapid response capability and operational effectiveness of MONUSCO so as to better respond to the difficult situation on the ground.

Yesterday, at the meeting of the countries contributing troops to MONUSCO (see S/PV.8196), many representatives spoke of the difficulties in equipping and training personnel, which merit the attention of the international community. We hope that the international community will provide the necessary support.

Thirdly, it is important to continue to scale up humanitarian and economic assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to help the country to advance the national reconstruction process and to resolve the root causes of the conflict.

The Chinese Government has consistently supported the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, provided assistance to its national reconstruction efforts to the extent possible, and contributed peacekeepers to MONUSCO. China stands ready to join the international community in continuing to play a constructive role in achieving peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The year 2018 is a crucial year for the Democratic Republic of Congo. As the Security Council prepares to renew the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), I would like to make three points: first, on the political process; secondly, on the role of MONUSCO in the elections; and thirdly, on the protection of civilians.

My first point, on the political process, the people of Democratic Republic of the Congo look forward to the country's first peaceful transfer of power through free, fair and credible elections at the end of this year. Progress towards that historic day continues, while progress in the implementation of the 31 December Political Agreement has stalled. Fundamental freedoms are threatened.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the violence used during the protests held on 25 February. All harassment of civil society, journalists and human rights defenders must end. We call on all parties to recommit to the spirit of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement

in order for the upcoming elections to gain the trust of the Congolese people.

My second point concerns the role of MONUSCO this year leading up to the elections. MONUSCO has a vital role to play in that context, not only in providing logistical support but also in supporting the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement, building trust among all actors and monitoring progress towards the elections. Therefore, our univocal support for MONUSCO, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General to effectuate good offices is indispensable. The Council must therefore show the will to monitor progress and equip MONUSCO in that regard.

My third point is on the protection of civilians, which must remain a priority for MONUSCO. We are very concerned about the upsurge in violence in Ituri over the last weeks. Sadly, it is not the only area where we see increased fighting and civilian casualties. MONUSCO is adapting to the circumstances through the "protection through projection" approach. It is the shared responsibility of the Council, the Secretariat, the troop-contributing countries as well as of the Congolese authorities to ensure that the conditions are met to make this a success. We have to keep that in mind during the mandate-renewal discussions.

Let me conclude by reiterating our sincere gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her and her team's relentless efforts. Together, we must work towards a better future for the Congolese people.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to encourage speakers under rule 37 to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. She Okitundu (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to participate in this Security Council meeting on the situation in my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I would like also to discharge my duty to congratulate the Kingdom of the Netherlands, your country, Mr. President, on its accession to the presidency of the Council for this month of March and to convey to you our deep appreciation for the manner in which you are presiding over our debates. I would once again like to express to the Council the gratitude of the Congolese people and its Government for the efforts that the United Nations continues to deploy in the quest for solutions to bring about a lasting peace in my country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and to express our appreciation to him for his commitment to defending and promoting the purposes and principles of the Charter and the cause of my country.

I must also thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, for his presentation of the report of the Secretary-General on MONUSCO (S/2018/174). Although I rightly appreciate the content of the report, nonetheless I would briefly like to state my Government's views on a number of the issues addressed therein.

The political aspect, as the Council is aware, remains dominated by the electoral process. Following the completion on 31 January of voter registration, the Independent National Electoral Commission will undertake in coming months, in keeping with the electoral calendar, to identifying and registering Congolese abroad. In the meantime, in order to strengthen confidence, dispel doubts and maintain contact with the various stakeholders in the process of ensuring that credible and transparent elections are held, the Commission has undertaken an awareness-raising and educational campaign on technical and operational questions relating to the elections, in particular relating to voting machines, with parties and political groups in the opposition, the majority and civil society. Since 1 February it has undertaken to clean up the electoral register, which will enable the Parliament to adopt a law on the distribution of seats during its current session. This stage will be the last institutional requirement for the holding of elections, in line with the electoral calendar.

As I underscored on 12 February during a meeting on the electoral process in my country, in order to ensure that the elections are well organized and to create a climate conducive to their success, the Government is working to fulfil the tasks that have been conferred on

it. In that context, the Government and MONUSCO, in the quest for a solution to the thorny issue of political de-escalation, met on 25 and 31 January to address, inter alia, issues relating to political demonstrations, the media and the release of so-called political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. The conclusions of the meeting came out in the form of a report that is to be signed by the stakeholders.

Furthermore, the Government is concerned at the improper use of the concept of political de-escalation in a charged context dominated by opposition-led insurrectional politics aimed at upending the established legal order, in violation of the Constitution and the Agreement of 31 December 2016 to hold a peaceful, credible and transparent elections. Political de-escalation should not be considered as a unilateral requirement that the Government alone should uphold. Inflammatory rhetoric seeking to undermine the institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, calls for insurrection and popular revolt by using places of worship and unjust targeted sanctions that violate the norms of international law do not contribute to the goal of easing the pre-electoral climate. De-escalation must concern all stakeholders: those of the majority, the opposition and civil society, including the Catholic Church, as well as international partners, which must act in the desired way, namely, to constructively and peacefully support the political process leading to elections.

On human rights, as I already told the Council, the situation regarding fundamental freedoms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not part of a deliberate policy to violate human rights. When such violations occur, they are solely the acts of the individuals involved and must not go unpunished.

Regarding the events of 31 December 2017 and 21 January 2018, the Government on 1 February 2018 set up a joint commission of inquiry with representatives of the Government, the National Human Rights Commission, non-governmental organizations that champion human rights, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Commission's mission is to consider the issue of loss of life and other related issues. The Commission is also charged with investigating the events of 25 February. Following the investigations, its conclusions will be communicated to the Ministry of Justice, which will transmit them to the judiciary.

Nonetheless, concerning the specific events of 25 February, it should be underscored that the two presumed suspects in the murders of two compatriots, in Mbandaka and Kinshasa, have been arrested.

On the justice system, it is important to recall that the trial on the murder of the two United Nations experts has been under way since 5 June 2017 at the military tribunal of Kananga, Kasai Central, which is holding its twenty-eighth public hearing. Twelve suspects are appearing and 13 others have fled and are being actively sought; they are being tried in absentia. Tshidima Constantin Bida Bula, accused of ordering the murders, was arrested at the end of December and is currently being questioned by the prosecutor general, who will then make him available to the competent court. Contrary to what some people are saying, it is precisely in order to cooperate fully with the Democratic Republic of the Congo follow-up mechanism — negotiated between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with the appointment of a special prosecutor — that the trial has slowed down, because we are awaiting new evidence, to be provided by the investigating team of the special prosecutor.

Indeed, the prosecutor considered that he had collected enough evidence to go to court, and it was under these conditions that the hearings I spoke of took place. They were moving towards an indictment by the public prosecutor and arguments for the defence when the military tribunal was asked to suspend the hearings while it awaited, as I noted, new evidence from international experts. Nonetheless, since it arrived in Kananga, in Kasai Central province, the Robert Petit team has been working in close cooperation with the high-level military investigation. The investigators returned to Kananga on 20 February, after having gone home for the New Year's holidays.

As for the four Congolese who accompanied the two experts, an investigation is under way at the military court in Kananga. It is also being conducted jointly with the monitoring mechanism of the Special Prosecutor of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On the security front, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are continuing their operations to rid North and South Kivu provinces of negative forces and reassert State authority in the Kasai area to restore peace and security.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which recently stepped up their attacks against the FARDC, peacekeepers and civilians, is a source of great concern that deserves the attention of the entire international community. For our part, on 13 January, the FARDC launched a vast military offensive, which unfortunately is being carried out without MONUSCO, to neutralize that negative force. The notable results of that operation included the death of ADF senior commander Muhamad Kayira, on 27 February during an operation to seize the Mapobo Valley. He was on a list of 26 Rwandan, Ugandan and Tanzanian nationals wanted by Congolese courts for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the region. As we have often pointed out, the ADF is using asymmetrical methods in their attacks. Special training and appropriate equipment are required to combat it.

As to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), although they are weakend, the FARDC continues to carry out the operations it started as part of its Operation Sukola II in order to completely eradicate it. As part of those efforts, my country calls once again for the involvement of the Security Council and the international community, in accordance with the recommendation of the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which was held in Brazzaville on 21 October 2017, for the unconditional repatriation to their country of origin, no later than 20 October, of disarmed FDLR ex-combatants and their dependents who are still in transit camps in Kisangani, in Tshopo province, and Kanyabayonga and Walungu, in North and South Kivu provinces. That unconditional repatriation also concerns ex-combatants of the former Mouvement du 23 Mars. In the same vein, all foreign fighters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including combatants from the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Sudanese People's Liberation Army in Opposition, were asked to return to their countries.

With regard to the humanitarian aspect, while recognizing the prevailing situation in the conflict-affected parts of our country, on which the Government's attention is focused, we believe that there is a great disparity between the statistics presented by some foreign partners and those provided by the Congolese public services in charge of humanitarian issues. In that regard, my Government believes that there is a need to strengthen collaboration and partnership in our humanitarian work in order to clarify the number of people, Congolese and others, in need of assistance. It should be noted that, in order to deal with the situation, the Government has established the National Fund for Humanitarian Solidarity. It goes without saying that any external support in this area is always welcome.

Thanks to the systematic work in the fight against impunity carried out by the judiciary in general, and by the military judiciary in particular, my country has made enormous progress in the fight against sexual violence, which is recognized by the Secretary-General in his letter of 27 April 2017 and in his various reports. Taking into account that situation, the Secretary-General has shown willingness to remove the FARDC and the Congolese National Police from the list of country security forces listed for rape. My country therefore continues to wait for that willingness to materialize and for the FARDC and the Congolese National Police to be effectively delisted.

With regard to the case of sexual violence referred to in paragraph 30 of the report under review (S/2018/174), my Government regrets that the information provided by MONUSCO did not respect the requirements of the national strategy to combat sexual violence, which calls for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Congolese Ministry of Gender to be the only institutions charged with producing data on cases of gender-based violence in general, and sexual violence in particular. In order to avoid contradictions in the statistics published by various United Nations bodies, United Nations agencies and MONUSCO must interact and communicate with UNFPA prior to publishing any reported case that falls under the category set out in the joint communiqué signed on 30 March 2013 between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations to combat conflict-related sexual violence.

In March 2017, my Government asked that the renewal of the mandate of MONUSCO take into account the expectations of the Congolese people, whose most ardent wish is to see the negative forces and various armed groups that are attacking the eastern part of the country totally eradicated. To that end, it is crucial to strengthen the operational effectiveness of United Nations forces, primarily those of the Force Intervention Brigade, the only offensive force that can counter those armed groups. In view of the situation on the ground, that wish remains in effect.

Considering that situation, my Government calls for a qualitative resizing of the MONUSCO force with fewer, but more specialized, troops who are able to track down armed groups and capable of dealing with asymmetrical threats. For the Mission's new mandate, those troops must work in close collaboration with the FARDC, enjoy greater flexibility and mobility, and be equipped with appropriate equipment for greater efficiency. Priority should therefore be given to the Force Intervention Brigade, the spearhead of that MONUSCO-FARDC partnership. In that regard, MONUSCO units that are not essential to military operations against armed groups and that are present in areas where a MONUSCO force is not justified, and where the concentration of forces is greater than the level of the threat, must be withdrawn to reduce the number of troops and adapt the force to the tracking of armed troops.

Returning to the Force Intervention Brigade, which operates in a partnership, my Government regrets that it has not been consulted on important issues affecting peace in the region, such as the withdrawal of Tanzanian artillery and South African aviation unit, as well as its relocation from the command centre of the Rapid Intervention Brigade in the theatre of operations to a fixed base in Goma, which undermined its effectiveness. As we just mentioned, it is important to equip it with appropriate equipment to make it more effective.

With regard to disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation, I am sure the Council will agree with me that this programme is of great importance in terms of reintegrating ex-combatants to prevent them from being recruited again by armed groups. That programme should be one of the priorities in MONUSCO's new mandate.

Discussions on the partnership between the Democratic Republic of Congo and MONUSCO should continue in the context of dialogue and the strategic review, the objective of which is the reorganization of human, financial, logistical and other resources, in accordance with the new mandate that the Security Council will entrust to MONUSCO. In those exchanges between our country and the United Nations, the review should focus on practical arrangements and planning for the gradual and permanent withdrawal of MONUSCO troops. Indeed, MONUSCO's goal is not to remain ad infinitum in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We must therefore hash out together a negotiated withdrawal strategy within a reasonable time frame. For the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Force Intervention Brigade should be the last to leave the country, along with civil services and various offices supporting democracy building, which can continue to carry out their activities after the end of the tracking operations against the armed groups.

We will have succeeded together in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate no longer needs to be discussed, which is the wish of the Congolese people and of my Government. We hope that this will be the penultimate renewal and will definitively contribute to the return of peace for the people of the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The crucial mandate entrusted to MONUSCO cannot be successful without eradicating armed groups, whose activities constitute the main threat to civilians. The terms of reference of the new MONUSCO mandate must therefore absolutely include the imperative of eradicating armed groups among the priorities of the strategic partnership and under the leadership of the FARDC. In order to be effective, the partnership must have the appropriate resources to carry out unconventional warfare and combat the asymmetrical methods of armed groups.

In conclusion, I wish to express my Government's appreciation to Mr. Maman Sambo Sidikou, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the work he carried out during his term in office at the Head of MONUSCO to restore peace in my country. My Government sincerely thanks him. In the same vein, my Government welcomes the appointment of Ms. Leila Zerrougui as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Government assures her of the same support given to her predecessor to enable her to carry out her duties.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.